



# Fire & Fuels Information 2006

## Interview with the Park Superintendent

*In January 2006, Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks welcomed Craig C. Axtell as the new Superintendent. This spring, Jody Lyle, the parks' Fire Education Specialist, sat down with Craig to discuss his background in fire management and his desire to communicate with local communities.*

**Jody Lyle:** I understand you've had a long career in fire. When did it start?

**Craig Axtell:** My first exposure to fire was actually growing up as a teenager. I helped fight an arson fire in my New Jersey neighborhood. In terms of the government, my fire experience began at Everglades National Park in the late 1970's when I was a Natural Resource Specialist. I did my first prescribed burns there.

**JL:** Both Everglades and Sequoia are known for having progressive fire management programs. What did you like about Everglades?

**CA:** They have a very strong scientific basis for their burning, similar to Sequoia. However, when I was there, the science was very developmental. I remember a big emphasis on establishing research plots and hearing about Sequoia National Park working on the same types of things. It's great to see how far fire science has come in the last few decades.

**JL:** Three years ago these parks completed a major revision to our Fire Management Plan. Have you ever written similar plans before?

**CA:** At Isle Royale National Park, I was responsible for the first Fire Management Plan that allowed for something other than fire suppression. We opened up the possibility for managers to use natural fires for the benefit of resources.



Craig C. Axtell, Superintendent of Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks - Photo by Steve Bumgardner

**JL:** Have you ever been involved with a controversial fire or fire program?

**CA:** In 1978, Rocky Mountain National Park managed the Ouzel Fire which started by lightning. It almost escaped the park which caused an incredible lack of trust and dislike for the Park Service by local residents. As a result, the park shifted to a suppression-only strategy for over seven years. When I got there, it was my job to get the fire use program going again. My first goal was to build trust and communication with local communities. I learned a lot from that experience. People want to know what is going on in their backyard and we, as an agency, have a responsibility to inform them. This communication should happen all year long not just when smoke is in the air or flames can be seen on the hillside.

**JL:** What do you think about the active fire season last year? The parks managed a large natural fire as well as ten prescribed fires.

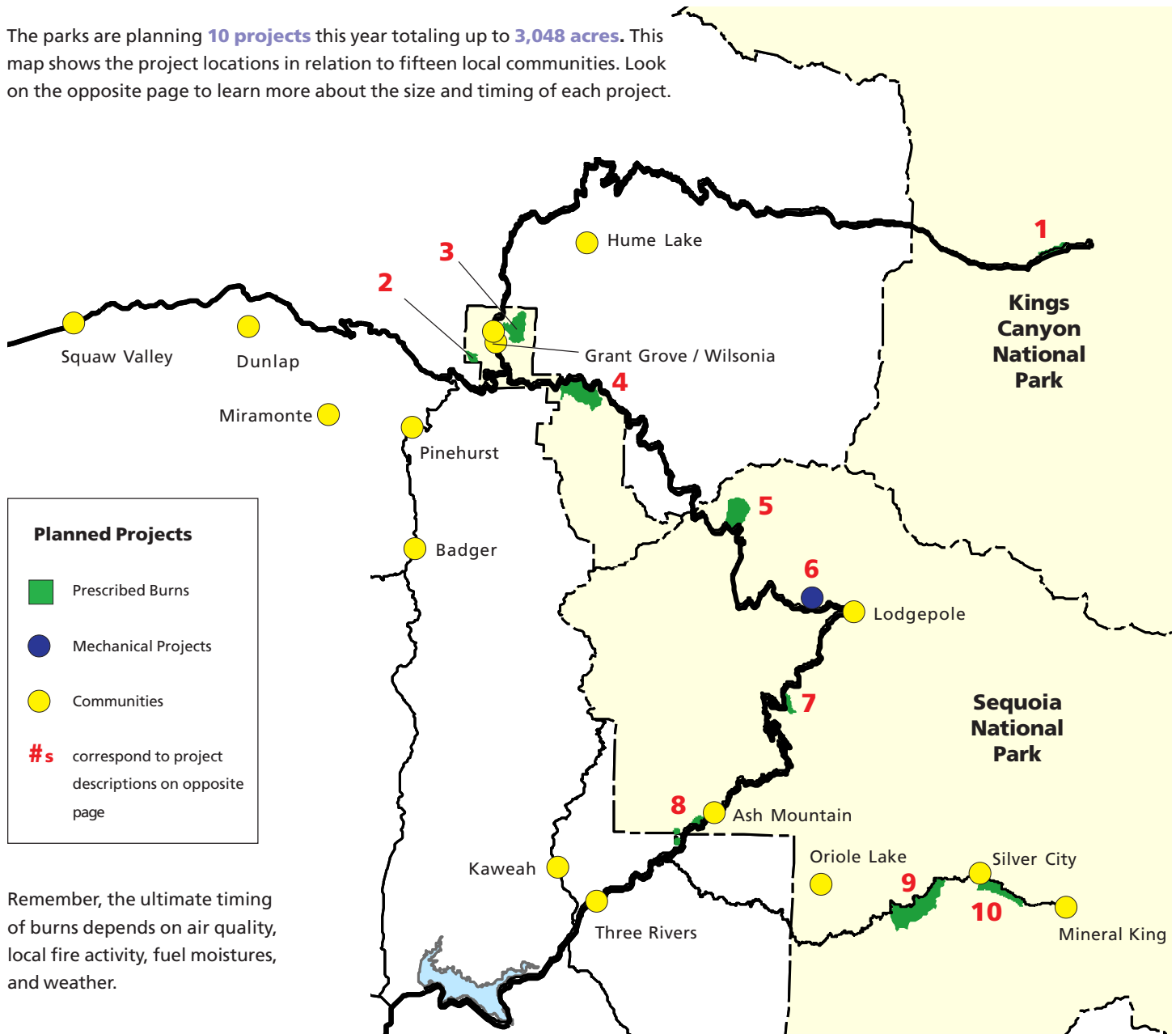
**CA:** Those accomplishments were important. But to me, the biggest part of last year's success was the support the parks received from local communities and our sister agencies including the Air District. That's a big deal. Now, it's my job to make sure that we don't rest on those laurels. I have an expectation that our fire program will always adapt to new information about safety, ecology, and communities. We can't become arrogant and assume we have all the answers.

**JL:** How do you feel about the ten fire projects planned for this summer and fall?

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## Project Locations for 2006

The parks are planning **10 projects** this year totaling up to **3,048 acres**. This map shows the project locations in relation to fifteen local communities. Look on the opposite page to learn more about the size and timing of each project.



Remember, the ultimate timing of burns depends on air quality, local fire activity, fuel moistures, and weather.



### What about Lightning Fires?

Unlike the planned projects described in this newsletter, lightning fires occur each year at unexpected times and locations. NPS crews are trained to respond quickly in these situations. If necessary, the parks are ready to shift priorities from planned projects to the management or suppression of lightning fires.

# Projects

## Cedar Grove Area

- 1 Horse Trail** (120 acres)  
Early summer prescribed fire

## Grant Grove Area

- 2 Ella** (70 acres)  
Fall prescribed fire
- 3 Valley View** (353 acres)  
Summer & fall prescribed fire
- 4 Upper Redwood** (619 acres)  
Summer prescribed fire

## Lodgepole, Giant Forest, and Dorst Areas

- 5 Cabin Meadow** (441 acres)  
Summer prescribed fire
- 6 Wuksachi** (10 acres)  
Summer mechanical project
- 7 Wall Spring** (175 acres)  
Summer prescribed fire

## Foothills Area

- 8 Ash Mountain** (25 acres)  
Late spring prescribed fires

## Mineral King Area

- 9 Davenport** (881 acres)  
Fall prescribed fire
- 10 Silver** (354 acres)  
Fall prescribed fire

\* If additional funding is available, three mechanical projects may be implemented in Giant Forest, Wilsonia, and Grant Grove.

(Continued from page 1)

**CA:** These projects are very important for the parks and our neighbors. Ultimately, the way I see it, fire is not an “if” but a “when.” Wouldn’t it be best to take advantage of fire’s benefits under managed conditions when there is a high probability of success? As the Superintendent of these parks, I don’t want to be forced into a reactive mode when the consequences can be destructive for the amazing resources we are entrusted to protect.

**JL:** Any memorable fire experiences?

**CA:** One took place at the Everglades [smiling]. It was my birthday (somewhere in my 20’s) and I was on the ignition crew for a prescribed burn. Not only was that one of the most fun days of my career, but I played a part in restoring the Everglades ecosystem. Another memorable moment for me was when I was talking about fire to a school group at Rocky Mountain. An older gentleman walked up and listened in. Afterwards, he came up to me and said, “I heard your talk and I understand, but I’ll never agree with you.” This was an important lesson that I still think about today. While I believe strongly

that we are doing the right thing to restore fire in the forest, there are some people who will never agree. We’ve got to respect that.

**JL:** How long have you lived in rural areas?

**CA:** For at least 25 years, I’ve lived in small, rural communities similar to the ones here near Sequoia and Kings Canyon. It’s interesting for me to see that parks and communities where I’ve lived in Colorado, Florida, and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan deal with very similar fire issues as here.

**JL:** What is one important thing you want me to remember when working with the public?

**CA:** Always provide accurate information that helps our neighbors understand the tough decisions we make and why. If we are confusing, we can’t develop trust and without that, we don’t have support. For this reason, I’m glad that we distribute these newsletters for our neighbors. I want them to know that we don’t have any secrets and we are happy to share information about fire.



## Reducing Your Exposure to Smoke

In the foothill communities here in the southern Sierra Nevada, smoke is an unfortunate reality. Whether it is present from an uncontrolled wildfire or a planned prescribed burn, here are a few simple actions that you can take to reduce your exposure:

**Stop outdoor activity** when smoke is present. Avoid physical exertion. Stay indoors as much as possible, especially seniors and children.

**Close windows,** doors, and outside vents when it is smoky. Set your air conditioner to re-circulate. Ventilate your home and work place when it is not smoky.

**Drink lots of water,** eat a balanced diet, and get adequate rest. A healthy immune system is the best protection against the effects of smoke.

**Be diligent** about taking any medicines prescribed by your doctor. People with pre-existing respiratory problems like heart or lung disease, asthma, or emphysema are at greater risk from smoke.

**Don’t bother wearing paper masks.** These masks generally will not protect your lungs from wildland fire smoke, and they may make it harder for you to breathe.

**Consult the local Air Quality Index (AQI)** on TV or in newspapers for assistance in planning your daily activities. The higher the AQI value, the greater the level of air pollution and the greater the health danger.

**Pay attention to your symptoms.** Some people have undiagnosed respiratory problems that can be triggered by exposure to smoke. Adhere to the guidelines above. Consult your healthcare provider if you experience sudden fatigue, heart palpitations, dizziness, chest or arm pain, or difficulty breathing.





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# INSIDE

## List of Fire Projects for 2006

### Photo - Ted Young

Two crewmembers work on the 2005 Quarry Prescribed Fire in Giant Forest. The burn reduced ground fuels, stimulated new growth, and provided educational opportunities for hundreds of park visitors.

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[www.nps.gov/seki/fire/fireinfo/current.htm](http://www.nps.gov/seki/fire/fireinfo/current.htm)

### About this Newsletter

This bi-annual newsletter is designed to provide accurate fire information for the residents of local communities near Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks.



Postal Customer

## NPS Fire & Fuels Management



Brit Rosso, Superintendent of the Arrowhead Hoshots, accepts his award in front of one hundred fire managers across the western United States.

### Kings Canyon Employee Receives National Award

On February 9, 2006, Brit Rosso was presented with the prestigious *Paul Gleason "Lead by Example" Award*. This interagency award comes from the National Wildfire Coordinating Group.

Rosso was nominated for the award by his peers on Hotshot crews around the country. He was recognized for his outstanding skills in mentoring and teamwork. Rosso has served the last ten years as the Superintendent of the Arrowhead Hotshots based in Kings Canyon.

"We are so proud of Brit's accomplishments and we value his leadership within our fire program," said David Bartlett, Acting Fire Management Officer for Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks. "It is a pleasure to see him receive this national award."